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ABSTRACT

An analysis of four major reports on the current quality of education in the United States turned up very little concern for international education. "A Nation at Risk" and the reports of the Education Commission of the States, the Twentieth Century Fund, and the Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching were examined and the major issues they addressed determined. Few of the reports referred to the kind of world children will live in--a world characterized by interconnectedness, interdependence, and a global interest in survival. Any definition of international education involves six broad categories of study: (1) area studies and foreign language, (2) multicultural and intercultural education, (3) international relations, (4) international development studies, (5) global issues education, and (6) education with a global perspective. Only one of the reports addressed more than one of these categories, and then only briefly. The content and tone of the reports suggest both a shift away from concern for equality in education and a growing tendency toward ethnocentrism. Studies have revealed an increasing lack of awareness of the outside world among American students. The failure of the major commission reports to address this issue is cause for considerable concern. (PGD)

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CURRENT VOICES OF REFORMS IN AMERICAN EDUCATION

ETHNOCENTRISM OR GLOBALISM

Presented at the

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UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
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BY

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EA 018 142

The flurry of studies and recommendations on the parlous health of education in the United States is unprecedented. In a span of no more than two years, no less than half a dozen serious and exhaustive analyses of education were published. Each provided a set of recommendations and prescriptions. With your permission, I hope to provide a brief summary of the major findings of these reports, compare shared findings and examine each as to its relevance to international education. The studies that will be examined are:

- National Commission on Excellence in Education: A Nation at Risk.
- Task Force on Education for Economic Growth. The Education Commission of the States
- Twentieth Century Fund, and
- Carnegie Commission for the Advancement of Teaching.

I. A Nation at Risk

- Primarily concerned with secondary schools; emphasizing
- Merit pay for performance;
- Increased local, state, and federal financing efforts;
- Back-to-basics
- Marrying the university to industry;
- Setting higher standards for teachers;
- More required courses in English, mathematics, and science;
- Stiffer college entrance and higher graduation requirements;
- Testing and approval of educational curricula and materials.

II. Education Commission of the States Report: Action for Excellence

Major recommendations are:

- It addressed three groups: business, labor, and the professions;
- Focussed on the role of the states, but regards education as a national priority;
- Expressed higher regard for teachers and teaching;
- Recommends making academic experience more intense (explicit and demanding);
- calls for providing quality assurance in education;
- improving leadership and management in the schools and
- serving better those students who are not unserved and underserved.

III. Twentieth Century Fund Task Force - Making the Grades

- Focused on education in urban areas;
- Principally calls for federal action; e.g.,
- Suggests master teacher plan funded by the federal government;
- A variety of special federal supports;
- Stresses the teaching of English, science education, and mathematics;
- It said that elementary and secondary schools are pressed to play so many roles that they are in danger of losing sight of their fundamental purpose;
- It called for common curricular "spine": includes both the basic skills associated with mastery of the primary and elementary curriculum and the complex skills taught in the high schools;
- Comprehensive approach to the study of foreign languages; i.e., every student should have the opportunity to acquire proficiency in a second language.
- At the undergraduate level, it emphasized mathematics and science education.

IV. Ernest Boyer - Carnegie Foundations Report

- Regards education as a federal priority;
- It advocates sweeping changes in high schools;
- Less educational theory and more academic studies for prospective teachers;
- Calls for a "core of common learning": literature, civics American history, math, science, foreign language, Western and non-Western civilization, the arts, technology, the meaning of work, and a new Carnegie unit, service (volunteer activities in the schools or community institutions after school or during the summer).
- A senior essay, based on independent project, is required for graduation of all students;
- Students be formally tested for mastery of language proficiency before entering high school;
- A breakaway from 50-minute units when longer study would be productive;
- Emphasized the importance of civics and global understanding,
- Single track: core courses for the first two years, then moving on either to advanced study, exploring job options, or both;
- Average teacher salaries be raised 20 percent beyond inflation in the next three years--career salary schedules be increased based on peer evaluation;
- Five-year rigorous course of teacher training and accreditation based on examination and faculty recommendations.

NEGATIVE COMMENTS

- Some said rasing the entrance requirements to college results in discrimination: what would be done for the many students who could not handle the tougher curriculum, they ask.
- specilists in the humanities decry the new emphasis on science and mathematics
- Special interest groups are exerting substantial influence to enhance their peculiar domains
- liberals claim the stress on academic rigor is, in fact, a subterfuge of elitism
- conservatives argue that prayer should be included in schools and secularism removed from schools
- higher standards of admission and graduation for college would reduce the opportunities for social mobility that have always characterized our society, some voices are heard saying.

One serious ommission in almost all these reports is a reference to the kind of world our school children will be struggling to live in---a world characterized by:

- interconnectedness, interdependence, and a global interest in staying alive.

When we subject the content of these sutdies as to their advocacy for international or global education they are found to be lacking. This is so even when we use a liberal definition of international education as a term encompassing diverse educational goals and strategies at different levels of the school system, colleges, and universities. Based on different goals, one can find different definitions for international education. Regardless of what definition we choose, six broad categories could be found. They are:

- Area studies and foreign language
- Multicultural and intercultural education
- International relations
- International development studies
- Global issues education
- Education with a global perspective

Any content found in any of the reports under related to one or more of the above categories makes that study, in my view, one with international education relevance.

Using the above criteria for judging relevance to international education, the reports showed a remarkable degree of neglect of certain areas. Area Studies/Foreign Languages are the only criteria briefly mentioned in only two of the reports under study. The Excellence Commission "stressed the desirability of proficiency in a foreign language. Teaching of foreign language should begin in the elementary school." As for the college-bound, the Commission recommended two years of foreign language instruction. The Twentieth Century Fund advocated that every public school student

have the opportunity to acquire proficiency in a second language. Multi/Intercultural Education, on the other hand, was mentioned only by the Twentieth Century Fund. The Fund recommended that "Federal funds now used for bilingual education should be used to teach non-English speaking children how to speak, read, and write English."

The Ominous Potential

The issue of educational reform is moving so quickly now that several new concerns have arisen. Whereas a short time ago almost no major political leader was talking about education, today almost all of them claim education as an issue of national magnitude. Recommendations abound, and implementation of some of them can be cited in many states and localities. All of these activities are surely for the good, but there is a potential ominous side. We shall examine this potential on both the content and tone of the reports.

Content of the Reports

The following analysis is based on an examination of the contents of the reports with respect to the categories established earlier in this paper.

Granted that almost all reports examined were not detailed as to content to be covered; however, thesketches of their suggested outlines are good indicators of the intent of the reports. The area of most mention, on the side of globalism, was the clear and deliberate emphasis placed on further development of foreign language instruction as we have seen. The areas of bilingualism and multiculturalism also received limited emphasis for further development.

Fears are raised concerning the inequalities that the recommended reforms might produce:

- raising entrance requirements to college would result in discrimination; and
- higher standards of admission and graduation for college would reduce the opportunities for social mobility.

Special interest groups are exerting substantial influences to enhance their domain:

- specialists in the humanities decried the new emphasis on science and mathematics;
- liberals claim the stress on academic vigor is, in fact, subterfuge for elitism; and
- conservatives argue that prayers should be included in schools and that secularism be removed from schools.

Tone of the Reports

The emphasis on quantifying the outcome of educational efforts has shifted much of the attention to a narrow stream of thought. No one can reasonably argue the merit of evaluating the process of instruction and measuring its outcome, but what are the risks? The literature is rich in stating those risks, but I will concentrate on one of the most important, and potentially damaging, of these risks: ethnocentrism. I am claming that I see too much ethnocentrism among our students on all levels.

Upon examination, it became clear that ethnocentrism was the dominant feature of almost all the reports investigated. For example, reforms were advocated in the name of achieving dominance over others. In other words, "being number one" was the goal vs. what is being learned. The desire for dominance was expressed militarily (better defense), economically (to stop the Japanese economic penetration), and primarily for national pride.

I recognize that I am leveling a serious charge--it is not a condemnation, but a plea for change--Let's review some data and see if I can offer some documentation to substantiate my claim.

This concern is not new: over the last few decades there has been some concern about the content of international programs at the undergraduate level. The 1973 AACTE[2] study, the 1979 ETS[3] study, the President's Commission on Foreign Languages and International Studies,[4] and the numerous national conferences on internationalizing the curriculum and developing a global perspective are but few examples of that concern. This concern is real and data-based: "Today's college students are so wrapped up in job-related studies that they are woefully ignorant of the world beyond U.S. shores."

These are not my words--this was the conclusion of a two-year project released in 1981 shoving wide-spread misconceptions among students about such issues as East-West detente, oil cartels, world religions, human rights and the nuclear-power balance. In this nationwide survey conducted by the Educational Testing Service (for the Education and the World View) scores ranged from an average of about 42 out of a possible 101 among freshman to 50.5 for seniors - clearly an undesirable level of performance by an criteria. The survey also measured students' attitudes and feelings about five international issues -- human rights, international cooperation, patriotism, war, and world government.[5]

Two thirds of the students did not know whether Islam or Christiantiy has more adherents. More than half thought Egypt is a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. (It is not) Samples of what stumped the students: Nearly 40% said most nations that have achieved independence since World War II are in Europe and Asia. Almost a third believed U.S. - Soviet detente had brought about a suspension of the arms race. (It hasn't).[6]

Other findings of interest was that "excessive patriotism" was "a surprisingly popular sentiment" among undergraduates. The idea of world government was also popular, but about 65% of the students opposed relinquishing national independence to a supra-national authority. And, in general, students were against war, except on some moral grounds. Finally, while the students knew the most about world health and population problems, geography of other nations, and foreign cultures, they showed the least knowledge about energy issues and world religions.

The above findings is in spite of the fact that there always was a genuine concern in the U.S. for infusing the curriculum of both the public schools and the colleges with content on international, global, or a world view. No reputable professional journal in education, for the last five years, can be found to have failed to raise the issue, defined or redefined the topics involved, and/or provided new perspectives on the subject. Yet we sadly see the results I previously cited.

What implications can we draw:

- There is an urgent need to educate citizens in our country to global understanding and responsibilities.
- Comparing the results of the 1979 ETS study, the 1973 AACTE study, and the1980 Global Understanding Survey (ETS) leads us to conclude that Americans are becoming less internationally aware.
- Developing a global awareness is necessary ingredient for developing a global society.
- Finally, teacher education institutions have the opportunity and the obligation to provide such literacy.

The seventies represented a renewed effort and a clear vigo in raising the concern for global education and enumerating the consequences to the nation of ignoring such a concern. The eighties can do no less because the cost of parochialism is shown to be unaffordable to the present generation and even more costly to future generations.

CONCLUSION

All nations exhibit nationalistic tendencies in the name of competition, but a higher aim should be found so that the accomplishment of one culture can enrich others. In this respect, the recommendations found in the reports we examined were found to be lacking. However, the reports served other purposes more nobly e.g. putting the educational agenda on a central stage. As an educator I am delighted to see this degree of attention given to education at this stage of my career.